

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

Meeting Date: March 15, 2006

Division: Employee Services

Bulk Item: Yes X No

Department: _____

Staff Contact Person: Teresa Aguiar
and Clark Martin

AGENDA ITEM WORDING: Approval to create three (3) new positions to allow one flight qualified paramedic to be assigned to Trauma Star at the hanger for each 24-hour shift.

ITEM BACKGROUND: Since 2002 the Trauma Star program has proven its worth by rapidly evacuating critically ill and injured patients to mainland medical facilities for specialized care. For the first three years medical staffing was provided by “robbing” ground ambulances of their crews to accomplish this mission. This was problematic because of delays incurred, if the ground ambulance was even available. Even so, this caused diminished service levels in the area from which the medical crew was plucked. The Trauma System Study Group (TSSG), chaired by Commissioner Rice, identified early on the need for dedicated EMS crew for the helicopter to alleviate these delays and impact on service delivery.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOCC ACTION: On February 15, 2006 the BOCC approved the purchase of a replacement helicopter for Trauma Star. Creation of these positions is necessary to achieve 24-hour staffing of the helicopter when it becomes operational later this spring.

CONTRACT/AGREEMENT CHANGES: N/A

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS: Approval.

TOTAL COST: \$36,803.24 per year plus benefits (each position) **BUDGETED:** Yes ☐ No ☒
Cost to be absorbed in current budget

COST TO COUNTY: \$163,406.29 per year

REVENUE PRODUCING: Yes X* No AMOUNT PER MONTH Year

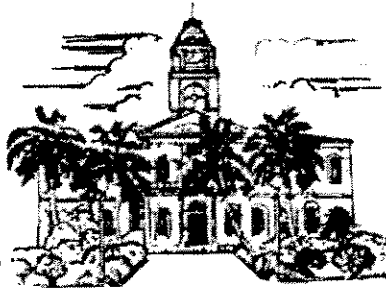
* Once Part 135 Certificate is obtained and billing for aeromedical service commences

APPROVED BY: County Atty N/A OMB/Purchasing Yes Risk Management N/A

DIVISION DIRECTOR APPROVAL: Teresa Aguiar
Teresa Aguiar

DOCUMENTATION: Included X Not Required

DISPOSITION: _____ **AGENDA ITEM #** _____



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Mayor Charles "Sonny" McCoy, District 3
Mayor Pro Tem Murray E. Nelson, District 5
Dixie Spehar, District 1
George Neugent, District 2
David P. Rice, District 4

FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT

Clark O. Martin, Jr., Fire Chief
490 63rd Street, Suite 141
Marathon, FL 33050



MEMORANDUM

TO: Teresa Aguiar, Division Director
Employee Services

FROM: Chief Clark O. Martin, Jr. *Collo*
Fire Rescue

SUBJECT: New Positions for Trauma Star

DATE: March 01, 2006

I am requesting three new Firefighter/Paramedic positions to provide for 24-hour staffing of Trauma Star once the new aircraft is acquired and becomes operational later this spring.

Background

In early 2002, realizing the need for Keys-based aeromedical service to evacuate critically injured or ill patients to appropriate medical facilities in mainland South Florida, Monroe County Sheriff Richard Roth was successful in acquiring a used Viet Nam era UH-1 Huey helicopter, which was already configured for EMS transport use, from Marion County, Florida. Through a partnership with Monroe County Fire Rescue, Trauma Star began operations where the Sheriff's Office pilots operated the helicopter and Monroe County Fire Rescue paramedics provided care in the patient/EMS compartment. Over time, Trauma Star's use in transporting the sick and injured to more definitive care far exceeded initial projections. The proficiency of the pilots, medical crew and ground-support units also increased.

There were, however, three major drawbacks to the program as it operated until the fall of 2005:

- Because the helicopter was a "public use" aircraft, the County could not bill patients and their health insurance companies for the transportation and medical care.

- The staffing configuration required Trauma Star to take off from Marathon Airport without paramedics and rendezvous with a designated Monroe County Fire Rescue ambulance at a designated helispot (landing zone). This caused varying delays in Trauma Star's arrival at the patient pick-up point and also resulted in a ground ambulance and/or fire engine being removed from service for the duration of that mission, some three to four hours.
- The wear and tear of the higher-than-projected call volume shortened the service life of the UH-1 to the point that it was removed from service in the fall of 2005.

In light of the above, among other concerns, a Trauma System Study Group (TSSG) was formed by Commissioner Rice in the fall of 2003 to address sustaining a Monroe County-based aeromedical service. The TSSG formed three subcommittees:

- Aviation -- to research and determine the most suitable replacement aircraft
- Finance -- to project costs and potential revenue
- Structure and Operations -- to consider various staffing configurations with relation to patients' demands, for both inter-facility movements and patients picked-up from a trauma scene

The final report included a recommendation from the Structure and Operations Subcommittee for medical crew configuration that the optimum staffing would consist of a nurse/paramedic and a paramedic for inter-facility transfers and two paramedics for on-scene trauma removals. They further recommended that the medical crew be stationed with the helicopter for immediacy of response and to lessen impact on ground assets.

In the interim, a new used helicopter has been located which is suitable for our use and is far superior to the UH-1 it is replacing. Negotiations for its purchase are near completion. Discussions between the County Administrator and the Sheriff's office have determined that it would not be economically feasible to staff Trauma Star with two on-duty paramedics in the near term until some history is developed with cost offset by revenue generation. With regard to flight nurse/paramedics, there is some doubt that Monroe County would be capable of providing the compensation that these highly-qualified individuals would demand, if there even is a pool of them available locally.

Due to a particular patient's condition, if additional medical personnel are needed, they will be "borrowed" from ground units at the scene or the sending hospital. This will introduce significant but surmountable training challenges into the operation to assure flight crew and patient safety as well as compliance with Florida Department of Health and Federal Aviation Administration requirements.

Recommendation/Request

I am requesting the creation of three firefighter/paramedic positions, one each for A, B, and C Shifts. Creation of these positions as firefighter/paramedics offers the following advantages:

- Existing, incumbent flight medics who already have the experience operating in the aeromedical environment in Monroe County will be able to more rapidly place the program back into operation once they are acclimated to the new aircraft.
- Granting "first shot" to those incumbent flight medics who have built the program to where it is today will be a morale booster.
- Assuring the option to under fill these three firefighter/paramedic positions with non-fire-certified paramedics gives us the flexibility to use these personnel if they are the best, or only, applicants for the positions.
- Assuming the positions are filled with firefighter paramedics, this yields greater flexibility to rotate personnel through these assignments and back to ground ambulances and fire apparatus to assure skills retention for all personnel involved. The fact is that in most cases, a flight paramedic ends up maintaining the patient in the packaging and treatment regimen initiated by the first-arriving ground unit paramedic. A flight paramedic who spends all of her time in this assignment will eventually suffer diminished "street skills". Likewise, back-up flight medics must spend periodic or rotational time on the helicopter to remain proficient with aircraft-based operations.
- In my experience, once permanent flight medics are introduced into an EMS system, there is a risk of a "prima donna" relationship developing in opposition to the ground units' paramedics. This can be avoided through a regular rotation through these assignments to foster the team concept.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

COM/dlh